

Court Information Release



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NIU Law's Prisoners' Rights Project Awarded Grant as Program Assisting Incarcerated Plaintiffs Enters Second School Year

The P. Michael Mahoney Chapter of the Federal Bar Association (FBA) has awarded Northern Illinois University College of Law a \$2,500 grant to continue its Prisoners' Rights Project. In this innovative project, third-year NIU Law students represent inmates at various correctional facilities in civil rights lawsuits filed in the court's Western Division, in Rockford.

"We are extremely pleased to see this one-of-a-kind program flourish. Our court and the greater community benefit from this unique partnership between NIU Law and the FBA," said Chief Judge Rebecca R. Pallmeyer.

"The NIU Prisoner Rights Project is valuable to the entire court. The Project provides representation to litigants who cannot otherwise afford it, while affording meaningful, hands-on training to future attorneys who will be practicing here after they graduate. The Project is a benefit to opposing counsel, as well, because it means that they can interact with an attorney and law students who understand the legal rules and procedure, enabling both sides to be more efficient in representing their clients. Finally, the Project alleviates pressures on the court. Cases involving unrepresented litigants require a disproportionate amount of judicial resources. When counsel is involved in these cases, judges have more time and energy for other matters, enhancing their ability to provide just, speedy, and inexpensive resolution for the full case load," said Magistrate Judge Iain Johnston.

"The work I did with the Prisoners' Rights Project was rewarding in so many ways. I learned invaluable real-life lawyering skills all while helping someone who truly needs my help. This program is helping to mold me into the lawyer I want to be," said Alonte

Holliday, a Rockford native, about his participation in the program last school year. Holliday represented an incarcerated plaintiff who filed an excessive force constitutional claim.

Thanks in part to the FBA Foundation grant, Northern Illinois University College of Law will, for second year in a row, will offer four third-year law students the opportunity to participate in this hands-on learning and service experience. Participating students will be allowed to try the cases in federal court under the supervision of an experienced civil rights trial attorney.

The project is the result of an effort by the members of the P. Michael Mahoney (Rockford, IL) Chapter of the Federal Bar Association and the NIU College of Law and is supported by a generous grant provided by the Foundation of the Federal Bar Association. Magistrate Judge Iain Johnston acts as liaison between the court and the NIU College of Law. Associate Dean Marc Falkoff of the College of Law oversees the Project on behalf of the NIU College of Law.

The Prisoner Rights Project is the only prisoner civil rights federal law clinic in the U.S. that is funded by an FBA Chapter.

The FBA is a voluntary membership organization that works “to strengthen the federal legal system and administration of justice by serving the interests and the needs of federal practitioners, judges and the public they serve.” The Mahoney Chapter of the FBA, named after now-retired U.S. Magistrate Judge P. Michael Mahoney, encompasses the Western Division of the Northern District of Illinois.

The U.S. District Court for the Northern District of Illinois serves eighteen northern Illinois counties, including both Cook and Winnebago. The Court has two divisions, with the Eastern Division located in Chicago and the Western in Rockford.

The College of Law at NIU is located in DeKalb on the university’s main campus and is a fully accredited, nationally recognized law school.

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